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USING TAPES AND HUMAN RECORDERS IN RECORDING CHILDREN'S DICTATED COMPOSITION.

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RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT ORAL LANGUAGE IS A BASIS FOR ACHIEVEMENT IN BOTH WRITING AND READING, AND MANY CHILDREN WHO HAVE NOT HAD SUFFICIENT EARLY HELP IN ORAL LANGUAGE HAVE DIFFICULTY WITH LANGUAGE SKILLS. HAVING CHILDREN DICTATE COMPOSITIONS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR GROWTH IN ORAL LANGUAGE, AND THE TRANSCRIPTIONS CAN PROVIDE A SOURCE OF READING MATERIAL. THE USE OF THE TAPE RECORDER IN DICTATED COMPOSITION IS AN EXCELLENT DEVICE FOR BUILDING LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH LISTENING, FOR DIAGNOSING CHILDREN'S USE OF LANGUAGE, AND FOR APPRAISING THEIR QUALITY OF SPEECH. TO STIMULATE DICTATION, BY GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS, THE TEACHER MUST MAKE AVAILABLE A WEALTH OF EXPERIENCES BASED ON THE CHILDREN'S OWN INVOLVEMENT. FROM THE FIRST DAY OF KINDERGARTEN, THE TEACHER CAN TAPE AND PLAY BACK UNREHEARSED CONVERSATION, REALIZING THAT THE KIND OF ACTIVITY IN WHICH THE CHILDREN ARE INVOLVED DIRECTLY RELATES TO THE TYPE OF SPEECH STIMULATED. THROUGHOUT THE ELEMENTARY GRADES, THE TEACHER SHOULD SEIZE EVERY POSSIBLE OPPORTUNITY TO TAPE AND TRANSCRIBE CHILDREN'S DICTATION, TO LET THEM HEAR AND READ THEIR COMPOSITIONS, AND, AS THEIR WRITING SKILLS DEVELOP, TO ASSIST THEM IN BECOMING THEIR OWN RECORDERS. (THIS SPEECH WAS PRESENTED AT THE 1967 NCTE ANNUAL CONVENTION.) (MM)

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USING TAPES AND HUMAN RECORDERS IN RECORDING CHILDREN'S DICTATED COMPOSITION

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Our society places much emphasis on the acquisition of a large, meaningful vocabulary at an early age. As a child acquires vocabulary, he grows in inquiry, comprehension, and general ability. Oral language is a basis for achievement in both writing and reading. The child who can create a good spoken sentence has a basic skill for written composition and for reading. Many immature children, who have difficulty in reading and writing, have not received sufficient help in oral language before formal instruction was started in these subjects.

A number of significant research studies show a strong link between the use of oral language and ability in reading and writing. Walter D. Loban[1] reported from evidence obtained in a study that children who were rated superior and above average in writing were also above average in speaking and reading. Those who were below average on any one of the three measures were also below average on the other two. He revealed that children in his study who were reading well by the end of the third grade had ranked high in oral language in kindergarten and during the first three years of the study.

Guiding children in language growth is the responsibility of each teacher from kindergarten through the elementary grades.

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[1] Walter D. Loban, The Language of Elementary School Children. Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1963.

Children cannot be expected to read and write fluently if they are unable to speak with spontaneity, clarity, flexibility, and well organized thought. There must be strength in the use of the language.

The Importance of Dictated Composition in Language Growth

The young child's first composition is dictated to the teacher in the kindergarten or first grade when he tells the story of an interesting experience such as a trip or when he tells about a picture he has painted. A child's dictation is a valuable aid in learning to speak well at an early age; likewise; his recorded dictation is an excellent source of reading material.

As a child dictates his own personal experiences, he extends and refines his vocabulary and when he sees his words transposed into print he grasps the relationship of oral and printed language. When he listens to a tape recording of his own dictation, he becomes more familiar with his own voice and speech patterns. This work, under the teacher's careful guidance, can be a strong motivational force in oral expression from kindergarten through other grade levels. Ample provision for dictation to accompany written composition is advocated for all children.

Children's dictated composition can be an aid in developing positive self-concept. Through growth in oral

expression, a child can develop pride in his own worth. He can become aware of himself as others listen to him. How valuable such an experience is for the disadvantaged child coming from a home where there may be no one who can serve as a language model and where there may be no one to speak with him or listen to him! Such a child, lacking incentive for speaking, may become apathetic and show little interest in oral expression. For this type of boy or girl, it is very important that language development be encouraged as soon as possible. There must be many interesting experiences to talk about, someone must listen, and hopefully, someone will record.

Work with children's dictated composition provides opportunity for the development of many abilities in a setting related directly to the experiences of the group. These abilities include fluency in speaking the language; improved patterns of sentence structure; organized thinking; auditory and visual discrimination of standard and substandard English; comprehension in listening and reading; growth in concept development; and the use of various word recognition techniques. All of these abilities are basic for work with written composition.

Stimulating and Nurturing Dictation for Recording Purposes

To stimulate the dictation of children's composition, a wealth of direct and indirect experiences should be provided. Boys and girls need something to talk about based on their own

involvement. An attractive classroom environment with a large variety of materials and interesting activities is very important. Many centers of interest should be in evidence where children can move about, observe, investigate, and share knowledge.

If a teacher is to stimulate and nurture creative dictation, she needs a thorough understanding of her children and the homes from which they come. She must show genuine interest and exercise patience if her students are to respond with ease and fluency of language. The emotional climate of the classroom should be one where children feel security when they are speaking.

For all children, it is important that language development be cultivated as early as possible. When the boys and girls walk into the kindergarten the first day, their creative, unrehearsed conversations can be taped and played back. As the tape is played, the children become acquainted with their own voices, they relive exciting experiences, and expression is fostered. The tape recorder can be set up and made ready for use at any time permitting the teacher to capitalize on what the children say throughout the day. Some of the most creative expression comes when children are telling each other of things they have done.

Boys and girls should be provided adequate periods of readiness work with oral language before being introduced to

print. Hildegard Thompson[2] in an article, "Teaching English to Indian Children," states that English language programs used by the Bureau of Indian Affairs set aside the first year of school for the development of oral expression among Indian children who speak English as a second language. These are tailored programs to meet the needs of boys and girls with special difficulties. First hand experiences provide the content for this language learning and the use of the tape recorder is emphasized in each classroom. Mrs. Thompson adds, in her article, that teachers using these methods have better success when they later teach the reading and writing of English. These statements pertaining to working with some of the Indian children should remind teachers to nurture oral expression carefully and to be judicious in the presentation of formal reading and writing.

Ethel Mabie[3] made an interesting study many years ago of the conversation of first grade children during free play periods where she tried to find if the activities in which children participated influenced the type of conversation carried on by them. She found that the kind of activities involved had a direct relation to the type of speech which was stimulated.

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[2] Hildegard Thompson, "Teaching English to Indian Children," Elementary English, April, 1966, pp. 333-340.

[3] Ethel Mabie, "A Study of the Conversation of First Grade Pupils During Free Play Periods," Journal of Educational Research, September, 1931, pp. 135-138.

Activities requiring cooperation stimulated the greatest amount of social speech. Those activities that were individual undertakings and that involved competition resulted in a much lower percentage of social speech and provoked much monologue. This study should have significance for teachers who wish to provide experiences in stimulating the interaction of children for group dictation.

Careful attention should be given to stimulating and nurturing the dictation of the disadvantaged child. Since he may be learning classroom dialect as a second language, he must hear and use this new language in many different experiences until it sounds natural and its meaning is understood. Teachers are well advised to accept the child's dialect for what it is; encourage communication; use the dialect for a basis; and then show the child more than one way of making a statement. Dictation, recorded by tape and on charts, is an excellent way to observe growth in dialect. Many years of endeavor may be required to teach the child a dialect different from that of his home and neighborhood.

Various personal and vicarious experiences may be used to stimulate children's oral composition. An experience need not be unique to provide material for dictation. Dictated composition often follows group or individual activities; however, the dictation may precede or be given simultaneously with an activity.

A list of opportunities for experiences that can lead

to dictation by young children includes:

1. Planning and taking trips and walks
2. Painting pictures
3. Observing an aquarium, terrarium, or indoor garden
4. Making puppets to dramatize a poem or story
5. Telling stories and completing unfinished ones
6. Sharing in "Show and Tell" periods
7. Looking at pictures and picture books
8. Viewing photographs of classroom activities
9. Observing novel objects
10. Viewing films and filmstrips
11. Listening to stories, poems, and recordings
12. Dramatizing, pantomining, and doing shadow play
13. Presenting flannelboard stories
14. Making a diorama
15. Giving a party
16. Viewing an interesting scene from the classroom windows
17. Listening to taped sounds such as pouring water into a glass; bouncing a ball; crumpling cellophane; striking a metal triangle; tinkling crystal with a spoon; and playing chimes.
18. Feeling collections of materials such as velvet, fur, sand paper, and aluminum foil
19. Smelling and tasting
20. Looking at an unusual collection such as a sea shell, a tiny cup, a baby spoon, a feather, a little doll, and a piece of soft white fur
21. Observing classroom pets and other animals

Alvina Treut Burrows, Doris Jackson, and Dorothy Saunders[4] in their book, "They All Want to Write", discuss the appeal of live things in the classroom and the many interesting activities pertaining to oral expression that can result from this kind of venture.

22. Collecting leaves, rocks, shells, relics, etc.

When a boy or girl brings something to school, the teacher has opportunity to capitalize on the incident by labeling the item, perhaps mounting it, exhibiting it, and letting the children talk about it. The teacher can tape and write the dictation and then let the boys and girls hear and read their dictated composition.

Throughout the school day, the teacher should seize every possible opportunity to foster and guide oral expression. Boys and girls must be awakened to the joy of using words.

The Value of Using Tapes in Recording Dictation

The tape recorder can open up new horizons for the pupils and the teacher. The use of the teacher's ears, alone,

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[4] Alvina Treut Burrows, Doris Jackson, and Dorothy O. Saunders, They All Want to Write, Third Edition. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1964, pp. 28-31.

in the study of oral composition is not enough. For accuracy in recording, for aural feedback, and for items that cannot be recorded by the written word, the mechanical device is superior.

The tape recorder is an excellent device for building skills through listening. Boys and girls gain much vocabulary while they listen, they are aided in the development of sentence patterns, and they obtain a wealth of ideas. Research studies show that ability in listening correlates well with reading ability and with competency in spoken sentence patterns.

In a research project done by Harry A. Greene and Emmett Betts[5], the accuracy of techniques used to collect errors in oral English was studied. The experiment made use of human recorders including court reporters, stenographers, long-hand reporters, and phoneticians in recording the dictation of children as they told the story of films they had seen. A microphone was concealed at almost the same distance from the children as the distance between the recorders and the pupils. One hundred thirty one compositions were dictated and recorded. Records were then analyzed to determine the accuracy of the human recorders and the electrical recorder. The mechanical device was 99.8% accurate while there was much inaccuracy in the human

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[5] Harry A. Greene and Emmett Betts, "Comparison of Simultaneous Recordings Made by Electric Recording Machine and 21 Selected Reporters", Elementary School Journal, September, 1932, pp. 753-761.

recordings. This research points out that care should be exercised in placing confidence in human recording as a means of getting an accurate picture of the oral expression of children.

Tapes of oral expression are valuable for diagnostic purposes. The teacher, through this means, can detect and evaluate strengths and weaknesses in productivity of content; depth of thinking; sequencing; originality of ideas; proficiency in expression; and complexity and completeness of sentence structure. Through careful diagnosis of recorded expression, areas of difficulty can be noted and help can be given. Tapes, which capture the child's full response, can be played again and again for accuracy in individual analysis and for group discussion.

The tape recorder is a valuable aid in appraising quality of speech in the child's dictation. Articulation, enunciation, pronunciation, non-verbal sounds, stress, pitch, juncture, emotional tone, and fluency in oral expression can be carefully observed and evaluated. Substitutions, distortions, and additions of sounds can be easily detected. Through the use of tapes, standard and non-standard samples of speech can be studied so that children can be guided in developing an auditory sensitivity to the difference.

The Role of the Teacher as a Human Recorder

Mechanical recorders are highly valuable tools in

recording and playing back children's composition; however, the teacher as a human recorder plays an extremely important role, too. The child benefits from seeing his own words written. As early as kindergarten, the teacher can sensitize children to print by recording their dictation of interesting experiences in manuscript writing on the chalkboard or on a chart as they watch. Although reading is not taught formally at this level, the teacher can read the composition back to the children. Those boys and girls who have reading ability in the kindergarten should be permitted to read their dictation. Programs in differentiated instruction at the pre-reading and beginning reading levels are often planned largely from the teacher's observations of the children's use of oral language and their work with dictation. Groups should be kept small to provide ample opportunity for individual expression.

Different methods may be used by the teacher in recording children's dictated composition. A teacher may wish to tape the oral expression as she records in writing on the chalkboard. The tape will provide verification of her written record. At other times, the teacher may wish to first record the dictation entirely by tape and later record in writing from this tape. Then she may use both her written composition and the playback with the children. This latter method permits more fluency of speech since the children do not find it necessary to hesitate for the recorder; however, in this procedure boys and girls are unable to see their own spoken words transposed into print

immediately. Many times the teacher will wish to work with recorded oral expression entirely by tape.

Work in dictated composition should be done both by individual children and by groups. The individual child may describe an experience as the teacher records. If the boy or girl has reading ability he may read his own dictation and if the content merits group work the group may be permitted to read it. Among the many experiences dictated by individual children are those pertaining to pictures they have painted. Some teachers prefer that children tell their stories first and then later paint their pictures. In this procedure the content of the story is not limited by the picture.

As the teacher records the dictation for a group or an individual she directs the expression when necessary with comments and questions such as "How shall we begin our story?" "What did we do next?" "Do you have more to say about this?" "How shall we end our story?" and "Can you think of a good title?" Discussion following the dictation may lead to questions by the teacher such as "Do you like the way we said this?" "Can you say this in another way?" "Did we say what we meant here?" and "Have we told our story in the right order?" Attention may be given in the discussion to capital letters and the marks of punctuation. After reading the story, the boys and girls enjoy making pictures to illustrate their dictation. One picture can be selected for the chart story which is printed by the teacher after she has

first recorded on the chalkboard. Certain sentences, phrases, and words from the content can be printed on cards for use in matching exercises. The story may be typed on a primer typewriter, duplicated for each child, illustrated by the children, and bound into booklets for reading material. Teachers may wish to tape the dictated stories in their final form for the listening set so that children can listen and follow the print in their booklets.

In addition to recording dictation during special class periods, the teacher should be alert throughout the day to the creative language spoken spontaneously by the students. As children express themselves in interesting ways, the teacher may note exciting, colorful expressions, she may write them down, and she may remark that she likes what has been said. Children enjoy working with their own sentences, expanding them, and transforming them. They show much interest in taking simple kernels from their sentences such as "girl ran" or "boy walked" and adding elements of expansion that will explain where, how, or when. Parts of sentences can be manipulated and moved about, transforming them in interesting ways.

Work with dictation prepares children for writing their own composition. When a child expresses the desire to write his own language and when he has sufficient facility in writing and spelling he can become his own human recorder; however, work with oral expression should not cease. Provision should be made

for dictation to accompany written composition at any level.

Teachers are reminded that the mechanics of written composition at an early age tend to inhibit freedom of expression. Miriam Howell[6] found in a study that a group of seven year old children composed longer compositions and used larger vocabularies when they used oral dictation freeing them from the mechanics of writing.

As children become their own recorders of composition they need assistance in spelling. Spelling aids at this period may include word lists for use at the desks, picture dictionaries, spelling word boxes, reading books, individual wordbooks, and wall lists. Many children will spell phonetically until they gain more knowledge in spelling.

Extending the Use of Recorded Dictation into Intermediate and Upper Grades

In the past years experiences with recorded dictation have been largely restricted to the primary grades. Teachers are well advised to extend this work into the higher grades thereby providing a foundation for improvement in writing and reading.

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[6]Miriam Howell, "The Control of Mechanics of Expression and the Quality of Preceding Experiences as Differentiating Factors in Certain Aspects of Composition of Seven Year Olds", unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1955.

Recorded expression provides teachers with a basis for helping students discover the processes of writing at any level. It is difficult to find a more effective way to develop ability for written composition.

Recorded dictation is not only an excellent foundation for improvement in writing but it is a valuable source of reading material both for younger boys and girls and for students of any age, including adults, who have difficulty in reading. Reading material composed of an individual's own dictated composition is of much interest to that person. Many students who have been unable to read and who have lost interest in printed material have been taught this skill through the use of their own recorded expression.

Eldonna Evertts[7] has stated in an article, "Literature and Composition in the Elementary Grades", that much more can be done with beginning chart stories written in the language of the child who dictates. She adds that there should be no restraint in either sentence structure or vocabulary. This writer would agree with these comments and would suggest that much more be done with the dictated composition of older students using their own structure and vocabulary as a basis for

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[7] Eldonna Evertts, "Literature and Composition in the Elementary Grades", New Directions in Elementary English, Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1967, pp. 208.

improvement. More work with dictated composition should be incorporated into the curriculum throughout the grades.

In Conclusion

If we, as teachers, wish to build strong programs in written composition and reading we must make use of the power of oral expression and the wealth of individual experiences that are found in the lives of our students. Only then can we expect to devolop the strength in our language arts programs that is necessary for the growth of our boys and girls.